EVERY DAY BIRDS

BY

BRADFORD TORREY

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BOSTON AND NEW YORK.

BLUE JAY

1. Male. 2, 3. Females

EVERYDAY BIRDS

ELEMENTARY STUDIES

BY

BRADFORD TORREY

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLORS AFTER AUDUBON, AND TWO FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1901

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EVERYDAY BIRDS

I

TWO LITTLE KINGS

THE largest bird in the United States is the California vulture, or condor, which measures from tip to tip of its wings nine feet and a half. At the other end of the scale are the hummingbirds, one kind of which, at least, has wings that are less than an inch and a half in length. Next to these insect-like midgets come the birds which have been well named in Latin "Regulus," and in English "kinglets," — that is to say, little kings. The fitness of the title comes first from their tiny size, — the chickadee is almost a giant in comparison, — and next from the fact that they wear patches of bright color (crowns) on their heads.

Two species of kinglets are found at one season or another in nearly all parts of the United States, and are known respectively as the golden-crown — or goldcrest — and the ruby-crown.

The golden-crown has on the top of its head an orange or yellow patch (sometimes one, sometimes the other) bordered with black; the ruby-crown wears a very bright red patch, though you may look at many specimens without finding it. Only part of the birds have it, — the adult males, perhaps, — and even those that have it do not always display it. The orange or yellow of the goldcrest, on the other hand, is worn by all the birds, and is never concealed. If you are a beginner in bird study, uncertain of your species, look for the black stripes on the crown. If they are not there, and the bird is really a kinglet, it must be a ruby-crown. You may know it, also, — from the goldcrest, I mean, — by what looks like a light-colored ring round the eye. In fact, one of the ruby-crown's most noticeable peculiarities is a certain bareheaded, large-eyed appearance.

Unless your home is near or beyond the northern boundary of the United States, you need not look for either kinglet in summer. The ruby-crown is to be seen during its migrations in spring and fall, the goldcrest in fall, winter, and spring.

At any time of the year they are well worth knowing. Nobody could look at them without admiration; so pretty, so tiny, and so exceed-

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET

1. Male. 2. Female

ingly quick and graceful in their motions. Both species are of a prevailing greenish or olive shade, with noticeable light-colored wing-bars, and light, unstreaked, unspotted under parts.

The ruby-crown is famous as a singer. A genuine music-box, we may call him. In spring, especially, he is often bubbling over with melody; a rapid, wren-like tune, with sundry quirks and turns that are all his own; on the whole decidedly original, with plenty of what musical people call accent and a strongly marked rhythm or swing. Over and over he goes with it, as if he could never have enough; beginning with quick, separate, almost guttural notes, and winding up with a *twittity, twittity, twittity,* which, once heard, is not likely to be soon forgotten.

A very pleasing vocalist he surely is; and when his extreme smallness is taken into account he is fairly to be esteemed a musical prodigy. Every one who has written about the song, from Audubon down, has found it hard to say enough about it. Audubon goes so far as to say that it is as powerful as a canary's, and much more varied and pleasing. That I must think an exaggeration; natural enough, no doubt, under the circumstances (romantic surroundings count for a good deal in all questions of this kind), but still a stretching of the truth. However, I give

but my own opinion. Let my readers hear the bird, and judge for themselves. They will enjoy him, whether or no. Every such new acquaintance that a man makes is a new source of life-long happiness.

The enormous California vulture is said to be almost dumb, having "no vocal apparatus" and "emitting only a weak hissing sound." What a contrast between him and the ruby-crown, — a mere speck of a bird, but with a musical nature and the voice of an artist. Precious stuff, they say, comes in small packages. Even the youngest of us may have noticed that it is always the smaller birds that sing.

But if all the singers are small birds, it is not true that all small birds are singers. The golden-crowned kinglet, for example, is hardly to be classed under that head. The gifts of Providence are various, and are somewhat sparingly dealt out. One creature receives one gift, another creature another, — just as is true of men, women, and children. This boy "has an ear," as the saying goes. He is naturally musical. Give him a chance, and let him not be too much in love with something else, and he will make a singer, or a player on instruments, or possibly a composer. His brother has no ear; he can hardly tell Old Hundred from Yankee Doodle. It is

useless for him to "take lessons." He can paint, perhaps, or invent a machine, or make money, or edit a paper, or teach school, or preach sermons, or practice medicine; but he will never win a name in the concert room.

The case of the golden-crown is hardly so hopeless as that, I am glad to believe; for if he is not much of a musician now, as he surely is not, he is not without some signs of an undeveloped musical capacity. The root of the matter seems to be in him. He tries to sing, at any rate, and not unlikely, as time goes on, — say in a million or two of years, — he may become as capable a performer as the ruby-crown is at present. There is no telling what a creature may make of himself if his will is good, and he has astronomical time in which to work. The dullest of us might learn something with a thousand years of schooling.

What you will mostly hear from the goldcrest is no tune, but a hurried *zee, zee, zee*, repeated at intervals as he flits about the branches of a tree, or, less often, through the mazes of a piece of shrubbery. His activity is wonderful, and his motions are really as good as music. No dancing could be prettier to look at. All you need is eyes to see him. But you will have to "look sharp." Now he is there for an instant, snatch-

ing a morsel or letting out a *zee, zee, zee*. Now he is yonder, resting upon the air, hovering against a tuft of pine needles, his wings all in a mist, they beat so swiftly. So through the tree he goes, and from one tree to another, till presently he is gone for good.

Once in a great while you may find him feeding among the dry leaves on the ground. Then you can really watch him, and had better make the most of your opportunity. Or you may catch him exploring bushes or low savins, which is a chance almost as favorable. The great thing is to become familiar with his voice. With that help you will find him ten times as often as without it. He is mostly a bird of the woods, and prefers evergreens, though he does not confine himself to them.

If you do not know him already, it will be a bright and memorable day — though it be the dead of winter — when you first see him and are able to call him by his regal name, *Regulus satrapa*. It is a great pity that so common and lovely a creature, one of the beauties of the world, should be unseen by so many good people. It is true, as we say so often about other things, that they do not know what they miss; but they miss a good deal, notwithstanding.

II

THE CHICKADEE

The chickadee, like many other birds, takes his name from his notes; from some of his notes, that is to say, for he has many others besides his best-known *chick-a-dee-dee-dee.* His most musical effort, regarded by many observers as his true song, sounds to most ears like the name Phœbe, — a clear, sweet whistle of two or three notes, with what musical people call a minor interval between them. It is so strictly a whistle that any boy can imitate it well enough to deceive not only another boy, but the bird himself.

In late winter and early spring, especially, when the chickadee is in a peculiarly cheerful frame of mind, it is very easy to draw him out by whistling these notes in his hearing. Sometimes, however, the sound seems to fret or anger him, and instead of answering in kind, he will fly near the intruder, scolding *dee-dee-dee.*

He remains with us both summer and winter, and wears the same colors at all seasons.

Perhaps no wild bird is more confiding. If a man is at work in the woods in cold weather, and at luncheon will take a little pains to feed the chickadees that are sure to be more or less about him, he will soon have them tame enough to pick up crumbs at his feet, and even to take them from his hand.

Better even than crumbs is a bit of mince pie, or a piece of suet. I have myself held out a piece of suet to a chickadee as I walked through the woods, and have had him fly down at once, perch on my finger like a tame canary, and fall to eating. But he was a bird that another man, a woodcutter of my acquaintance, had tamed in the manner above described.

The chickadee's nest is built in a hole, generally in a decayed stump or branch. It is very pretty to watch the pair when they are digging out the hole. All the chips are carried away and dropped at a little distance from the tree, so that the sight of them littering the ground may not reveal the birds' secret to an enemy.

Male and female dress alike. The top of the head is black — for which reason they are called black-capped chickadees, or black-capped titmice — and the chin is of the same color, while the cheeks are clear white. If you are not sure that you know the bird, stay near him till he

CHICKADEE

1. Male. 2. Female

pronounces his own name. He will be pretty certain to do it, sooner or later, especially if you excite him a little by squeaking or chirping to him.

Although the chickadee is small and delicate-looking, he seems not to mind the very coldest of weather. Give him enough to eat, and the wind may whistle. He picks his food, tiny insects, insects' eggs, and the like, out of crevices in the bark of trees and about the ends of twigs, and so is seldom or never without resources. The deepest snows do not cover up his dinner-table. His worst days, no doubt, are those in which everything is covered with sleet.

One of his prettiest traits is his skill in hanging back downward from the tip of a swinging branch or from the under side of a leaf while in search of provender. As a small boy, who had probably been to the circus, once said, the chickadee is a "first-rate performer on the flying trapeze."

III

THE BROWN CREEPER

In the midst of a Massachusetts winter, when a man with his eyes open may walk five miles over favorable country roads and see only ten or twelve kinds of birds, the brown creeper's faint *zeep* is a truly welcome sound. He is a very little fellow, very modestly dressed, without a bright feather on him, his lower parts being white and his upper parts a mottling of brown and white, such as a tailor might call a "pepper and salt mixture."

The creeper's life seems as quiet as his colors. You will find him by overhearing his note somewhere on one side of you as you pass. Now watch him. He is traveling rather quickly, with an alert, business-like air, up the trunk of a tree in a spiral course, hitching along inch by inch, hugging the bark, and every little while stopping to probe a crevice of it with his long, curved, sharply pointed bill. He is in search of food, — insects' eggs, grubs, and what not; morsels so tiny that it need not surprise us to see

him spending the whole day in satisfying his hunger.

There is one thing to be said for such a life: the bird is never without something to take up his mind. In fact, if he enjoys the pleasures of the table half as well as some human beings seem to do, his life ought to be one of the happiest imaginable.

How flat and thin he looks, and how perfectly his colors blend with the grays and browns of the mossy bark! No wonder it is easy for us to pass near him without knowing it. We understand now what learned people mean when they talk about the "protective coloration" of animals. A hawk flying overhead, on the lookout for game, must have hard work to see this bit of a bird clinging so closely to the bark as to be almost a part of it.

And if a hawk does pass, you may be pretty sure the creeper will see him, and will flatten himself still more tightly against the tree and stay as motionless as the bark itself. He needs neither to fight nor to run away. His strength, as the prophet said, is to sit still.

But look! As the creeper comes to the upper part of the tree, where the bark is less furrowed than it is below, and therefore less likely to conceal the scraps of provender that he is in search

of, he suddenly lets go his hold and flies down to the foot of another tree, and begins again to creep upward. If you keep track of him, you will see him do this hour after hour. He never walks down. Up, up, he goes, and if you look sharply enough, you will see that whenever he pauses he makes use of his sharp, stiff tail-feathers as a rest — a kind of camp-stool, as it were, or, better still, a bracket. He is built for his work; color, bill, feet, tail-feathers — all were made on purpose for him.

He is a native of the northern country, and therefore to most readers of this book he is a winter bird only. If you know his voice, you will hear him twenty times for once that you see him. If you know neither him nor his voice, it will be worth your while to make his acquaintance.

When you come upon a little bunch of chickadees flitting through the woods, listen for a quick, lisping note that is something like theirs, but different. It may be the creeper's, for although he seems an unsocial fellow, seldom flocking with birds of his own kind, he is fond of the chickadee's cheerful companionship.

To see him and hear his *zeep*, you would never take him for a songster; but there is no telling by the looks of a bird how well he can sing. In

BROWN CREEPER

1. Male. 2. Female

fact, plainly dressed birds are, as a rule, the best musicians. The very handsome ones have no need to charm with the voice. And our modest little creeper has a song, and a fairly good one; one that answers his purpose, at all events, although it may never make him famous. In springtime it may be heard now and then even in a place like Boston Common; but of course you must go where the birds pair and nest if you would hear them at their finest; for birds, like other people, sing best when they feel happiest.

The brown creeper's nest used to be something of a mystery. It was sought for in woodpeckers' holes. Now it is known that as a general thing it is built behind a scale of loose bark on a dead tree, between the bark and the trunk. Ordinarily, if not always, it will be found under a flake that is loose at the bottom instead of at the top. Into such a place the female bird packs tightly a mass of twigs and strips of the soft inner bark of trees, and on the top of this prepares her nest and lays her eggs. Her mate flits to and fro, keeping her company, and once in a while cheering her with a song, but so far as has yet been discovered he takes no hand in the work itself. It is quite possible that the female, who is to occupy the nest, prefers to have her own way in the construction of it.

After the young ones are hatched, at all events, the father bird's behavior leaves nothing to be complained of. He "comes to time," as we say, in the most loyal manner. In and out of the nest he and the mother go, feeding their hungry charges, making their entry and exit always at the same point, through the merest crack of a door, between the overhanging bark and the tree, just above the nest. It is a very pretty bit of family life.

It would be hard to imagine a nest better concealed from a bird's natural enemies, especially when, as is often the case, the tree stands in water on the edge of a stream or lake. And not only is the nest wonderfully well hidden, but it is perfectly sheltered from rain, as it would not be if it were built under a strip of bark that was peeled from above. All in all, we must respect the simple, demure-looking creeper as a very clever architect.

IV

THE BROWN THRASHER

THE brown thrasher — called also the brown thrush — is a bird considerably longer than a robin, with a noticeably long tail and a long, curved bill. His upper parts are reddish brown or cinnamon color, and his lower parts white or whitish, boldly streaked with black. You will find him in hedgerows, in scrub-lands, and about the edges of woods, where he keeps mostly on or near the ground. His general manner is that of a creature who wishes nothing else so much as to escape notice. "Only let me alone," he seems to say. If he sees you coming, as he pretty certainly will, he dodges into the nearest thicket or barberry-bush, and waits for you to pass.

Farmers know him as the "planting-bird." In New England he makes his appearance with commendable punctuality between the twentieth of April and the first of May; and while the farmer is planting his garden, the thrasher encourages him with song. One man, who was planting beans, imagined that the bird said,

"Drop it, drop it! Cover it up, cover it up!" Perhaps he did. It was good advice, anyhow.

In his own way the thrasher is one of the great singers of the world. He is own cousin to the famous mockingbird, and at the South, where he and the mocker may be heard singing side by side, — and so much alike that it is hard to tell one from the other, — he is known as the "brown mocking-bird." He would deserve the title but for one thing — he does not mock. In that respect he falls far short of his gray cousin, who not only has all the thrasher's gift of original song, but a most amazing faculty of imitation, as every one knows who has heard even a caged mocking-bird running over the medley of notes he has picked up here and there and carefully rehearsed and remembered. The thrasher's song is a medley, but not a medley of imitations.

I have said that the thrasher keeps near the ground. Such is his habit; but there is one exception. When he sings he takes the very top of a tree, although usually it is not a tall one. There he stands by the half-hour together, head up and tail down, pouring out a flood of music; sounds of all sorts, high notes and low notes, smooth notes and rough notes, all jumbled together in the craziest fashion, as if the musician were really beside himself.

BROWN THRASHER

1, 2, 3. Males. 4. Female

It is a performance worth buying a ticket for and going miles to hear; but it is to be heard without price on the outskirts of almost any village in the United States east of the Rocky Mountains and south of Maine. You must go out at the right time, however, for the bird sings but a few weeks in the year, although he remains in New England almost six months, or till the middle of October. He is one of the birds that every one should know, since it is perfectly easy to identify him; and once known, he is never to be forgotten, or to be confounded with anything else.

The thrasher's nest is a rude, careless-looking structure, made of twigs, roots, and dry leaves, and is to be looked for on the ground, or in a bush not far above it. Often it has so much the appearance of a last year's affair that one is tempted to pass it as unworthy of notice. I have been fooled in that way more than once.

The bird sits close, as the saying is, and as she stares at you with her yellow eyes, full at once of courage and fear, you will need a hard heart to disturb her. Sometimes she will really show fight, and she has been known to drive a small boy off the field. Her whistle after she has been frightened from her eggs or nestlings is one of the most pathetic sounds in nature. I

should feel sorry for the boy who could hear it without pity.

Besides this mournful whistle, the thrasher has a note almost exactly like a smacking kiss, — very realistic, — and sometimes, especially at dusk, an uncanny, ghostly whisper, that seems meant expressly to suggest the presence of something unearthly and awful. So far as I am aware, there is no other bird-note like it. I have no doubt that many a superstitious person has taken to his heels on hearing it from the bushes along a lonesome roadside after nightfall.

Except in the spring, indeed, there is little about the thrasher's appearance or behavior to suggest pleasant thoughts. To me, at any rate, he seems a creature of chronic low spirits. The world has used him badly, and he cannot get over it. He is almost the only bird I ever see without a little inspiration of cheerfulness. Perhaps I misjudge him.

Let my young readers make his acquaintance on their own account, if they have not already done so, and find him a livelier creature than I have described him, if they can.

V

THE BUTCHER-BIRD

"BUTCHER-BIRD" is not a very pretty name, but it is expressive and appropriate, and so is likely to stick quite as long as the more bookish word "shrike," which is the bird's other title. It comes from its owner's habit of impaling the carcasses of its prey upon thorns, as a butcher hangs upon a hook the body of a pig or other animal that he has slaughtered.

In a place like the Public Garden of Boston, if a shrike happens to make it his hunting-ground for a week or two, you may find here and there in the hawthorn-trees the body of a mouse or the headless trunk of an English sparrow spitted upon a thorn. Grasshoppers are said to be treated in a similar manner, but I have never met with the bird's work in the grasshopper season.

The shrike commonly seen in the Northern States is a native of the far north, and comes down to our latitude only in cold weather. He travels singly, and if he finds a place to suit him, a place where the living is good, he will often

remain almost in the same spot for weeks together.

In size and appearance he resembles the mockingbird. His colors are gray, black, and white, his tail is long, and his bill is hooked like a hawk's.

He likes a perch from which he can see a good distance about him. A telegraph wire answers his purpose very well, but his commonest seat is the very tip of a tallish tree. If you look across a field in winter and descry a medium-sized bird swaying on the topmost twig of a lonesome tree, balancing himself by continual tiltings of his long tail, you may set him down as most likely a butcher-bird.

His flight is generally not far from the ground, but as he draws near the tree in which he means to alight, he turns suddenly upward. It would be surprising to see him alight on one of the lower branches, or anywhere, indeed, except at the topmost point.

Small birds are all at once scarce and silent when the shrike appears. Sometimes in his hunger he will attack a bird heavier than himself. I had once stopped to look at a flicker in a roadside apple-tree, when I suddenly noticed a butcher-bird not far off. At the same moment, as it seemed, the butcher-bird caught sight of the flicker, and made a swoop toward him. The

flicker, somewhat to my surprise, showed no sign of panic, or even of fear. He simply moved aside, as much as to say, "Oh, stop that! Don't bother me!" How the affair would have resulted, I cannot tell. To my regret, the shrike at that moment seemed to become aware of a man's presence, and flew away, leaving the woodpecker to pursue his exploration of the apple-tree at his leisure.

The shrike has a very curious habit of singing, or of trying to sing, in the disjointed manner of a catbird. I have many times heard him thus engaged, and can bear witness that some of his tones are really musical. Some people have supposed that at such times he is trying to decoy small birds, but to me the performance has always seemed like music, or an attempt at music, rather than strategy.

Southern readers may be presumed to be familiar with another shrike, known as the loggerhead. As I have seen him in Florida he is a very tame, unsuspicious creature, nesting in the shade-trees of towns. The "French mocking-bird," a planter told me he was called. Mr. Chapman has seen one fly fifty yards to catch a grasshopper which, to all appearance, he had sighted before quitting his perch. The power of flight is not the only point as to which birds have the advantage of human beings.

VI

THE SCARLET TANAGER

When I began to learn the birds, I was living in a large city. One of the first things I did, after buying a book, was to visit a cabinet of mounted specimens — "stuffed birds," as we often call them. Such a wonderful and confusing variety as there was to my ignorant eyes! Among them I remarked especially a gorgeous scarlet creature with black wings and a black tail. It was labeled the scarlet tanager. So far as I was concerned, it could not have looked more foreign if it had come from Borneo. My book told me that it was common in Massachusetts. It *might* be, I thought, but I had never seen it there. And a bird so splendid as that! Bright enough to set the woods on fire! How could I have missed it?

Well, there came a Saturday, with its half-holiday for clerks, and I went into the country, where I betook myself to the woods of my native village, the woods wherein I had rambled all the years of my boyhood. And that afternoon, be-

SCARLET TANAGER

1. Male. 2. Female

fore I came out of them, I put my opera-glass on two of those wonderful scarlet and black birds. It was a day to be remembered.

Since that time, of course, I have seen many like them. In one sense, their beauty has become to me an old story; but I hope that I have set here and there a reader on a hunt that has been as happily rewarded as mine was on that bright summer afternoon. In one respect, the beginner has a great advantage over an old hand. He has the pleasure of more excitement and surprise.

The bird to be looked for is a little longer than a bluebird, of a superb scarlet color except for its wings and tail, which, as I have said, are jet-black. I speak of the male in full spring costume. His mate does not show so much as a red feather, but is greenish yellow, or yellowish green, with dark — not black — wings and tail.

You may see the tanager once in a while in the neighborhood of your house, if the grounds are set with shade-trees, but for the most part he lives in woods, especially in hard woods of a fairly old growth.

One of the first things for you to do, with him as with all birds, is to acquaint yourself with his call-notes and his song. The call is of two syllables, and sounds like *chip-chirr*. It is easily remembered after you have once seen the bird in

the act of uttering it. The song is much in the manner of the robin's, but less smooth and flowing. I have often thought, and sometimes said, that it is just such a song as the robin might give us if he were afflicted with what people call a "hoarse cold." The bird sings as if his whole heart were engaged, but at the same time in a noticeably broken and short-winded style.

The oftener you hear him, the easier you will find it to distinguish him from a robin, although at first you may find yourself badly at a loss. A boy that can tell any one of twenty playmates by the tones of his voice alone will need nothing but practice and attention to do the same for a great part of the sixty or seventy kinds of common birds living in the woods and fields about him.

The tanager's nest is built in a tree, on the flat of a level branch, so to speak, generally toward the end. Sometimes, at any rate, it is a surprisingly loose, carelessly constructed thing, through the bottom of which one can see the blue or bluish eggs while standing on the ground underneath.

It must be plain to any one that the mother bird, in her dull greenish dress, is much less easily seen, and therefore much less in danger, as she sits brooding, than she would be if she wore

the flaming scarlet feathers that render her mate so handsome.

Southern readers will know also another kind of tanager, not red and black, but red all over. He, too, is a great beauty, although if the question were left to me, I could not give him the palm over his more northern relative. The red of the southern bird is of a different shade — "rose-red" or "vermilion," the books call it. He sings like the scarlet tanager, but in a smoother voice. Although he is a red *bird*, he is not to be confounded with the southern *red*-bird. The latter, better known as the cardinal grosbeak, is a thick-billed bird of the sparrow and finch family. He is frequently seen in cages, and is a royal whistler.

The scarlet tanager — the male in red and black plumage — is not to be mistaken for anything else in the Eastern States. Once see him, and you will always know him. For that reason he is an excellent subject for the beginner. He passes the winter in Central or South America, and returns to New England in the second week of May. He makes his appearance in full dress, but later in the season changes it for one resembling pretty closely the duller plumage of his mate.

VII

THE SONG SPARROW

Sparrows are of many kinds, and in a general way the different kinds look so much alike that the beginner in bird study is apt to find them confusing, if not discouraging. They will try his patience, no matter how sharp and clever he may think himself, and unless he is much cleverer than the common run of humanity, he will make a good many mistakes before he gets to the end of them.

One of the best and commonest of them all is the song sparrow. His upper parts are mottled, of course, since he is a sparrow. His light-colored breast is sharply streaked, and in the middle of it the streaks usually run together and form a blotch. His outer tail-feathers are not white, and there is no yellow on the wings or about the head. These last points are mentioned in order to distinguish him from two other sparrows with streaked breasts — the vesper sparrow and the savanna.

By the middle of March song sparrows reach

SONG SPARROW

1. Male. 2. Female

New England in crowds, — along with robins and red-winged blackbirds, — and are to be heard singing on all hands, especially in the neighborhood of water. They remain until late autumn, and here and there one will be found even in midwinter.

The song, for which this sparrow is particularly distinguished, is a bright and lively strain, nothing very great in itself, perhaps, but thrice welcome for being heard so early in the season, when the ear is hungry after the long winter silence. Its chief distinction, however, is its amazing variety. Not only do no two birds sing precisely alike, but the same bird sings many tunes.

Of this latter fact, which I have known some excellent people to be skeptical about, you can readily satisfy yourself, — and there is nothing like knowing a thing at first hand, — if you will take the pains to keep a singer under your eye at the height of the musical season. You will find that he repeats one strain for perhaps a dozen times, without the change of a note; then suddenly he comes out with a song entirely different. This second song he will in turn drop for a third, and so on. The bird acts, for all the world, as if he were singing hymns, of so many verses each, one after another.

It is really a wonderful performance. There are very few kinds of birds that do anything like it. Of itself it is enough to make the song sparrow famous, and it is well worth any one's while to hear it and see it done. Nobody can see it without believing that birds have a true appreciation of music. They are better off than some human beings, at all events. They know one tune from another.

A lady correspondent was good enough to send me, not long ago, a pleasing account of the doings of a pair of song sparrows, which, as she says, came to her for six seasons.

"One year," she writes, "they happened to build where I could watch them from the window, and they did a very curious thing. They fed the little birds with all sorts of worms of different colors until they were ready to leave the nest; then the male brought a pure white moth and held it near the nest, which was in some stems of a rosebush a few inches from the ground, on a level with the lower rail of a picket fence.

"One of the little birds came out of the nest at once and followed its parent, who went sidewise, always holding the dazzling white morsel just out of the youngster's reach. In this manner they crossed the lane, climbed the inclined

plane of a woodpile, and passed through a fence and across a vegetable garden into an asparagus bed, in which miniature forest the little traveler received and ate the moth.

"Another nest was built on the bank of a brook on the farther side of a road. Out of this nest I saw two little fellows coaxed with these snow-white moths, and led across the dusty road into a hedge."

One or two experiences of this kind are sufficient reward for a good deal of patient observation. The singer of this pair of birds, my correspondent says, had ten distinct songs, one of them exceedingly beautiful and peculiar.

The song sparrow's nest is usually built on the ground, and the bird is one of several kinds that are known indiscriminately by country people as ground sparrows.

Song sparrows seem to be of a pretty nervous disposition, to judge from their behavior. One of their noticeable characteristics is a twitching, up-and-down, "pumping" motion of the tail, as they dash into cover on being disturbed.

People who live in the Southern States see these birds only in the cooler part of the year, but must have abundant opportunity to hear them sing as spring approaches.

VIII

THE FIELD SPARROW AND THE CHÏPPER

All beginners in bird study find the sparrow family a hard one. There are so many kinds of sparrows, and the different kinds look so confusingly alike. How shall I ever be able to tell them apart? the novice says to himself.

Well, there is no royal road to such learning, it may as well be confessed. But there is a road, for all that, and a pretty good one, — the road of patience; and there is much pleasure to be had in following it. If you know one sparrow, be it only the so-called "English," you have made a beginning.

If you know the English sparrow, I say; for, strange as it may seem, I find numbers of people who do not. Take the average inhabitant of any of our large cities into the country, and let him come upon an English sparrow in a wayside hedge, and there are three chances to one that he will not know with certainty what to call it. Quite as likely as not he has never noticed that there are two kinds of English spar-

rows, very differently feathered — the male and the female.

In a short chapter like this I am not going to attempt a miracle. If you read it to the end, never so carefully, you will not be prepared to name all the sparrows at sight. As I said before, they are a hard set. My wish now is to speak of two of the smallest and commonest.

One of these is called sometimes the chipping sparrow, sometimes the chipper, and sometimes — much less often — the doorstep sparrow. Personally, I like the last name best, — perhaps because I invented it. Scientific men, who prefer for excellent reasons to have their own names for things, call him *Spizella socialis* — that is to say, the familiar or social little spiza, or sparrow. The idea of littleness, some young readers may not know, is contained in the termination *ella*, which is what grammarians call a diminutive. Umbrella, for instance, is literally a small *umbra*, or shade.

With most readers of this book the chipping sparrow is a bird of spring, summer, and autumn. For the winter he retires to our extreme Southern States and to Mexico. If you live in Massachusetts, you may begin to be on the watch for him by the 5th of April. If your home is farther south, you should see him somewhat earlier.

Perhaps you will know him by this brief description: a very small, slender sparrow, with a dark chestnut-red crown, a black forehead, a black bill, and plain — unstreaked and unspotted — under parts.

His ordinary note, or call, is a *chip* (whence his name), and his song is a very dry, tuneless, monotonous, long-drawn *chippy-chippy-chippy*, uttered so fast as to sound almost like a trill. You may like the bird never so well, but if you have any idea of music, you will never call him a fine singer. What he and his mate think about the matter there is, of course, no telling. He seems to be very much in earnest, at all events.

He is a social bird, I say. You will not have to go far afield or into the woods in search of him. If you live in any sort of country place, with a bit of garden and a few shrubs and fruit trees, a pair of chippers will be likely to find you out. Their nest will be built in a tree or bush, a small structure neatly lined with hair, and in due time it will contain four or five eggs, blue or greenish blue, with brown spots.

Our other bird is of the chipper's size, and, like him, has unstreaked and unspotted lower parts. His bill is of a light color, "reddish brown," one book says, "pale reddish," says another. This is one of the principal marks for

the beginner to notice. Another is a wash of buff, or yellowish brown, on the sides of the breast. The upper parts, too, are in general much lighter than the chipper's.

You will not be likely often to find this bird in your garden or about the lawn. He is called the field sparrow, but he lives mostly in dry old pastures, partly overgrown with bushes and trees. His nest is placed on the ground, or in a low bush, and is often lined wholly or in part with hair. He and the chipper belong to what is called the same genus. That is to say, the two are so nearly related that they have the same surname. The chipper is *Spizella socialis*, the field sparrow is *Spizella pusilla;* just as two brothers will have one name in common, say, Jones, William, and Jones, Andrew.

The chipper is a favorite on account of his familiar, friendly ways. The field sparrow deserves to be known and loved for his music. Few birds sing better, in my opinion, though many make more display and are more talked about. The beauty of the song is in its sweetness, simplicity, and perfect taste. It begins with three or four longer notes, which run at once into quicker and shorter ones, either on the same pitch or a little higher. Really the strain is almost too simple to make a description of: a

simple line of pure melody, one may say. You must hear it for yourself. Sometimes the bird gives it out double, so to speak, catching it up again just as he seems ready to finish. The tone is the clearest of whistles, and the whole effect is most delightful and soothing. It is worth anybody's while to spend a season or two in bird study, if only to learn this and half a dozen more pieces of our common wild-bird music.

The field sparrow's times of arrival and departure are practically the same as the chipper's. Neither bird is hard to see, or very hard to distinguish; a bit of patience and an opera-glass will do the business; though you may have to puzzle awhile over either of them before making quite sure of your knowledge. In bird study, as in any other, we learn by correcting our own mistakes.

IX

SOME APRIL SPARROWS

For the first three weeks of April the ornithologist goes comparatively seldom into the woods. Millions of birds have come up from the South, but the forest is still almost deserted. May, with its hosts of warblers, will bring a grand change in this respect; meanwhile the sparrows are in the ascendant, and we shall do well to follow the road for the most part, though with frequent excursions across fields and into gardens and orchards. Of eighty-four species of birds seen by me in April, a year ago, twenty-one were water birds, and of the remaining sixty-three, twenty, or almost one third, were members of the sparrow family, while only five were warblers. In May, on the other hand, out of one hundred and twenty-five species seen twenty-three were warblers, and only eighteen were sparrows. To represent the case fairly, however, the comparison should be by individuals rather than by species, and for such a comparison I have no adequate data. My own opinion is that of all the birds

commonly seen in April, more than half, perhaps as many as four fifths, are members of the sparrow family. There are days, indeed, when the song sparrows alone seem to outnumber all other birds, and other days when the same is true of the snowbirds.

The large and noble sparrow family, which includes not only the sparrows, commonly so called, but finches, grosbeaks, crossbills, snowbirds, buntings, and the like, is represented in North America by more than ninety species, and in Massachusetts by about forty. It is preëminently a musical family, and, with us at least, April is the best month of the twelve in which to appreciate its lyrical efforts, notwithstanding the fact that one of its most distinguished songsters, the rose-breasted grosbeak, is still absent.

Among the more gifted of its April representatives are the fox sparrow, — so named from his color, — the purple finch, the song sparrow, the vesper sparrow, the tree sparrow, the field sparrow, and the white-throated sparrow — seven common birds, every one of them deserving to be known by any who care for sweet sounds.

One of the seven, the purple finch, also called the linnet, is unlike all the others, and easily excels them all in the fluency and copiousness of his music. He is readily distinguishable — in

adult male plumage — as a sparrow whose head and neck appear to have been dipped in carmine ink, or perhaps in pokeberry juice. His song is a prolonged, rapid, unbroken warble, which he is much given to delivering while on the wing, hovering ecstatically and singing as if he would pour out his very soul. He is a familiar bird, a lover of orchards and roadside trees, but is not so universally distributed, probably, as most of the other species I have named.

In contrast with the purple finch, all the six sparrows here mentioned with him have brief and rather formal songs. Those of the fox sparrow and the tree sparrow bear a pretty strong resemblance to each other, especially as to cadence or inflection; the song sparrow's and the vesper sparrow's are still more closely alike, and will almost certainly confuse the novice, while those of the field sparrow and the white-throat are each quite unique.

The fox sparrow visits Massachusetts as a migrant only, and the same might be said of the white-throat, only that it breeds in Berkshire County and single birds are often seen in the eastern part of the State during the winter. The tree sparrow is a winter resident, going far north to rear its young, and the remaining four species are with us for the summer.

The fox sparrow is to be heard from the 20th of March (I speak roughly) to the middle of April. In respect to voice and cadence, he is to me the finest of our sparrows proper, though I do not think him so finished an artist as the song and vesper sparrows. He may be recognized by his superior size and his bright rusty-red (reddish brown) color. Indeed, these two features give him at first sight the appearance of a thrush. He is one of the sparrows — like the song, the vesper, the savanna, and the Ipswich — which are thickly streaked upon the breast.

The tree sparrow passes the winter with us, as I have said, but abounds only during the two migrations. He is in full song for the greater part of April. His distinctive marks are a bright reddish ("chestnut") crown, conspicuous white wing-bars, and an obscure round blotch in the middle of his unstreaked breast.

The white-throat, commonly a very abundant migrant, arrives about the 20th of April and remains till about the middle of May. His loud, clear song is remarkable for its peculiar and strongly marked rhythm. It consists of two comparatively long introductory notes, followed by three sets of triplets in monotone — like *see, see, peabody, peabody, peabody.* This bird, too, perplexing as the sparrows are usually thought

to be, is perfectly well marked, with a white throat (not merely a white chin, as in the swamp sparrow) and a broad white stripe on each side of the crown, turning to yellow in front of the eyes. The crown itself is dark, with a white line through the middle, and each wing is adorned with two white bars. In size the white-throat comes next to the fox sparrow.

The song sparrow and the vesper sparrow not only sing alike, but look alike. The latter may be told at once, however, by his white outer tail feathers, which show as he flies. These are two of our commonest and worthiest birds. The vesper sparrow, more generally known, perhaps, as the bay-winged bunting, likes a drier field than the song sparrow, and is especially noticeable for his trick of running along the path or the road directly in front of the traveler.

X

THE ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK

THERE is never a May passes, of recent years, but some one comes to me, or writes to me, to inquire about a wonderfully beautiful bird that he has just seen for the first time. He does hope I can tell him what it is. It is a pretty large bird, he goes on to say, — but not so long as a robin, he thinks, if I question him, — mostly black and white, but with such a splendid rosy patch on his breast or throat! What can it be? He had no idea that anything so handsome was ever to be seen in these parts.

If all the questions that people ask about birds were as easily answered as this one, I should be thankful. It is a rose-breasted grosbeak, I tell the inquirer. Perhaps he noticed that its bill was uncommonly stout. If he did, the fact is exceptional, for somehow the shape of the bill is a point which the average person seems very seldom to notice, although it is highly important. Anyhow, the rosebreast's beak is most decidedly "gross." And he is every whit as beautiful as

ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK

1. Males. 2. Female. 3. Young Male

my inquirer represents him to be. In that respect he ranks with the oriole and the scarlet tanager.

He is distinguished also for his song, which is a flowing warble, wonderfully smooth and sweet. To most ears it bears a likeness to the robin's song, but it is beyond comparison more fluent and delicious, although not more hearty. Keep your ear open for such a voice, — by the middle of May if you live in New England, a little earlier if your home is farther south, — and you will be likely to hear it; for at that time the bird is not only common, but a very free singer.

In addition to his song, the rosebreast has a short call-note, which sounds very much like the squeak of a pair of rusty shears — a kind of *hic*, which you will find no difficulty about remembering if you have once learned it. His nest is generally built in a bush, often within reach of the hand, but I have seen it well up in a rather tall tree. The two birds spell each other in brooding, and are not only mutually affectionate, but very brave. I have known the mother bird to keep her seat even when I took hold of the bush below the nest and drew her almost against my face. She, by the way, is a very modestly dressed body, being not only without the rose-color, but without the clear

contrast of black and white. To look at her, you might take her for a large sparrow.

The rose-color of the male, it should be said, is not confined to the patch on the breast, but is found also on the lining of the wings, where it is mostly unnoticed by the world, but where his mate, of course, cannot help admiring it as he flutters about her; for it is certain that female birds have a good eye for color, and believe that fine feathers help, at least, to make fine birds. The shade is of the brightest and most exquisite, and the total effect of the male's plumage — jet black, pure white, and vivid rose-red — is quite beyond praise.

The birds, happily, are not shy, and prefer a fairly open or broken country rather than a dense wood. Last season one sang day after day directly under my windows, and undoubtedly had a mate and a nest somewhere close by. The male, it should be added, has the very pretty though dangerous-seeming habit of singing as he sits upon the eggs.

XI

THE BLUE JAY

SOME years ago, as the story comes to me, two collectors of birds met by accident in South America, one of them from Europe, the other from the United States. "There is one bird that I would rather see than any other in the world," said the European. "It is the handsomest of all the birds that fly, to my thinking, although I know it only in the cabinet. You have it in North America, but I suppose you do not often see it. I mean the blue jay."

What the American answered in words, I do not know; but I am pretty confident that he smiled. The European might almost as well have said that he supposed Boston people did not often see an English sparrow. Not that the blue jay swarms everywhere as the foreign sparrow swarms in our American cities; but it is so common, so noisy, so conspicuous, and so unmistakable, that it is, or ought to be, almost an everyday sight to all country dwellers.

Strange as it seems, however, I find many

people who do not know the jay when they see it. In late winter, say toward the end of February, when I begin to be on the lookout for the first bluebird of the year, I am all but certain to have word brought to me by some one of the village school-teachers that bluebirds have already come. Johnny This or Jimmy That saw one near his house several weeks ago! That "several weeks ago" makes me suspicious, and on following up the matter I discover that John and James have seen a large blue bird, larger than a robin, with some black and white on him — *all* white underneath — and wearing a tall crest or topknot. Then I know that they have mistaken a blue *bird* for a *blue*bird. They have seen a blue jay, a bird of a very different feather. He has been with us all winter, as he always is, and has been in sight from my windows daily. So easy is it for boys and men to guess at things, and guess wrong.

The jay is a relative of the crow, and has much of the crow's cleverness, with more than the crow's beauty. Like the crow, if he has an errand near houses, he makes a point of doing it in the early morning before the folks who live in the houses have begun to stir about. In fact, he knows us, in some respects at least, better than we know him, and habitually takes advan-

tage of what no doubt seems to him a custom of very late rising on the part of human beings.

Among small birds of all sorts he bears a decidedly bad name. In nesting time you may hear them uttering a chorus of loud and bitter laments as often as he appears among them. Their eggs and young are in danger, and they join forces to worry him and drive him away. One bird sounds the alarm, another hears him and hastens to see what is going on, and in a few minutes the whole neighborhood is awake. And it stays awake till the jay moves off. After that piece of evidence, you do not need to *see* him doing mischief. The little birds' behavior is sufficiently convincing. As Thoreau said, the presence of a trout in the milk is something like proof.

And jays, in their turn, club together against enemies larger than themselves. Last autumn I was walking through the woods with a friend, — a city schoolmaster eager for knowledge, as every schoolmaster ought to be, — when we heard a great screaming of blue jays from a swampy thicket on our right hand.

"Now what do you suppose the birds mean by all that outcry?" said my friend.

I answered that very likely there was a hawk or an owl there.

"Let's go and see," said the master, and we turned in that direction. Sure enough, we soon came face to face with a large hen-hawk perched in one of the trees, while the jays, one after another, were dashing as near him as they dared, yelling at him as they passed.

At our nearer approach the hawk took wing; then the jays disappeared, and silence fell upon the woods. And I dare say the schoolmaster gave me credit for being a wondrously wise man!

The jay has many notes, and once in a great while may even be heard indulging in something like a warble. One of his most musical calls sounds to my ears a little like the word "lily."

He seems to be very fond of acorns, and is frequently to be seen standing upon a limb, holding an acorn under his claw and hammering it to pieces with all the force of his stout bill. When angered, he scolds violently, bobbing up and down in a most ridiculous manner. In fact, he is of a highly nervous temperament, and as full of gesticulations as a Frenchman.

To me he is especially a bird of autumn. At that season the woods are loud with his clarion, and as I listen to it I can often feel myself a boy again, rambling in the woods that knew me in my school-days. With all his faults — his ill treatment of small birds, I mean — I should be sorry to have his numbers greatly diminished.

XII

THE KINGBIRD

As a very small boy I spent much time in a certain piece of rather low ground partly grown up to bushes. Here in early spring I picked bunches of pretty pink and white flowers, which I now know to have been anemones. In the same place, a month or two later, I gathered splendid red lilies, and admired, without gathering it, a tiny blue flower with a yellow centre. This would not bear taking home, but was always an attraction to me. I should have liked it better still, I am sure, if some one had been kind enough to tell me its pretty name — blue-eyed grass.

Here, also, I picked the first strawberries of the season and the first blueberries. They were luxuries indeed. A "gill-cup" full of either of them was good pay for an hour's search.

In one corner of the place there were half a dozen or so of apple-trees, and on the topmost branches of these there used to perch continually two or three birds of a kind which some older

boy told me were kingbirds. At these my brother and I — both of us small enough to be excusable for such mischief — were in the habit of throwing green apples; partly to see how near we could come to hitting them, partly for the fun of watching them rise into the air, circle about with sharp cries, and then settle back upon the perches they had left. Sometimes we stuck the half-grown apple on the end of a stick, swung the stick round our heads, and sent the apple flying to a tremendous distance. Stick or no stick, however, we were in no danger of killing anything, as I am glad now to remember.

What amazed us was that the birds did not go away. No matter how long we "appled" them, they were certain to be on hand the next day in the same place. We must have been very young and very green, — greener even than the apples, — for it never occurred to us that the birds had nests in the trees, and for that reason were not to be driven away by our petty persecutions.

Even then I noticed the peculiar flight of the birds — the short, quick strokes of their wings, and their habit of hovering. These are among the signs by which the kingbird can be recognized a long way off. He is dark-colored above, — almost black, — pure white underneath, and his tail, when outspread, shows a broad white

border at the tip. On his crown is an orange-red patch, but you will probably never see it unless you have the bird in your hand and brush apart the feathers in search of it.

The kingbird's Latin name has much the same meaning as his common English one. *Tyrannus tyrannus* he is called by scientific people. He belongs to a family known as flycatchers, birds that catch insects on the wing. That is the reason why the kingbird likes a perch at the tip of something, so that he can dart out after a passing insect, catch it, and return to his perch to wait for another. *I* should call him the "apple-tree flycatcher," if the matter were referred to me.

He is not large, — little bigger than an English sparrow, — but he has plenty of courage and a strong disposition to "rule the roost," as the saying goes. Every country boy has laughed to see the kingbird chasing a crow. And a very lively and pleasing sight it is: the crow making for the nearest wood as fast as his wings will carry him, and one or two kingbirds in hot pursuit. Their great aim is to get above him and swoop down upon his back. Sometimes you will see one actually alight on a crow's back and, as boys say, "give it to him" in great style.

Another taking action of the kingbird is his

trick of flying straight up in the air, almost perpendicularly, as if he were trying to see how near he could come to performing that impossible feat, and then tumbling about madly, with noisy outcries. Often it looks as if he actually turned somersaults. He cannot sing, and so has to let his high spirits bubble over in these half-crazy gymnastics. All in all, he is a very lively and entertaining customer.

His nest is built in a tree, often in an orchard, and is comparatively easy to find. The birds arrive in New England in the first week of May, having passed the winter in Central or South America, and remain till the end of August.

Like most birds, they are very punctual in their coming and going. No doubt they have an almanac of their own. You will do well to find one of them in Massachusetts after the first two or three days of September.

Toward the end of their stay, flycatchers though they are, they feed largely upon berries. I have seen a dozen in one small dogwood bush, all eating greedily.

XIII

THE HUMMINGBIRD

Hummingbirds are found only in America and on the islands near it. They are of many kinds, but only one kind is ever seen in the eastern United States. This is known as the ruby-throated hummingbird, because of a splendid red throat-patch worn by the male. To speak more exactly, the patch is red only in some lights. You see it one instant as black as a coal, and the next instant it flashes like a coal on fire. This ornament, — a real jewel, — with the lovely shining green of the bird's back, makes him an object of great beauty.

Every one knows him, or would do so only that some people confuse him with bright-colored, long-tongued hummingbird moths that are seen hovering, mostly in the early evening, over the flowers of the garden.

The ruby-throat spends the winter south of the United States. He arrives in Florida in March, but does not reach New England till near the middle of May.

Many persons seem to imagine that the hummer lives on the wing. They have never seen one sitting still, they say. But the truth is that hummingbirds pass but a small part of the time in the air. They are so very small, however, that they are easily overlooked on a branch of a tree, and the average person never notices them except when the hum of their wings attracts his attention.

One of the prettiest sights in the world is a hummingbird hovering before a blossom, his wings vibrating so fast as to make a mist about him, and his long needle of a bill probing the flower with quick, eager thrusts. All his movements are of lightning-like rapidity, and even while your eyes are on him he is gone like a flash, you cannot say whither.

The hummingbird's nest is built on a branch of a tree, — saddled on it, — and is not very hard to find after you have once seen one, and so have learned precisely what to look for. Generally it is placed well out toward the end of the limb. I have found it on pitch-pines in the woods, on roadside maples, — shade trees, — and especially in apple and pear orchards. The mother bird is very apt to betray its whereabouts by buzzing about the head of any one who comes near it.

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD

1, 2. Males. 3. Female. 4. Young

Last May, for example, I stopped in the middle of the road to listen for the voice of a house wren, when I caught instead the buzz and squeak of a hummer. Turning my gaze upward, I saw her fly to a half-built nest on a maple branch directly over my head.

The nest is a tiny thing, looking for size and shape like a cup out of a child's toy tea-set. Its walls are thick, and on the outside are covered — shingled, we may say — with bits of gray lichen, which help to make the nest look like nothing more than a knot. Whether they are put on for that purpose, or by way of ornament, is more than I can tell.

The bird always lays two white eggs, about as large as peas. The young ones stay in the nest for three weeks, more or less, till they are fully grown and fledged, and perfectly well able to fly. I once saw one take his first flight, and a great venture it seemed. All these three weeks, and for another week afterward, the mother — no father is present — has her hands full to supply the little things with food, which she gives them from her crop, thrusting her long, sharp bill clean down their throats in the process, in a way to make a looker-on shiver. The only note I have ever heard from the ruby-throat is a squeak, which seems to be an expres-

sion of nervousness or annoyance, and is uttered whenever an intruder — a man, a cat, or a strange bird — comes near the tree in which her treasures are hidden.

Hummingbirds sometimes fly into open windows and are caught. At such times they become tame almost at once, but it is difficult, if not impossible, to keep them alive in captivity, and it is cruel to attempt it, except when the little creature is injured and plainly unable to look out for itself.

A lady of my acquaintance discovered a hummingbird under her piazza. It had flown in by accident, probably, and now was darting to and fro in a frantic attempt to get out. The piazza was open on three sides, to be sure, but the frightened bird kept up against the ceiling, and of course found itself walled in.

Fearful that it would injure itself, the lady brought a broom and tried to force it to come down and so discover its way out; but it was only the more scared. Then a happy thought came to her. She went to the garden, plucked a few flowers, and going back to the piazza, set them down for the bird to see. Instantly it flew toward them, and as it did so it saw the open world without, and away it went.

Another lady wrote me once a very pretty

story of a hummer that came and probed a nasturtium which she held in her hand.

It is wonderful to think that so tiny a bird, born in New England or in Canada in June, should travel to Cuba or Central America in the autumn, and the next spring find its way back again to its birthplace.

XIV

THE CHIMNEY SWIFT

EVERY kind of bird is adapted to get its living in a particular way. It is strong in some respects, and weak in others. Some birds have powerful legs, but can hardly fly; others live on the wing, and can hardly walk. Of these flying birds none is more common than the chimney swift, or, as he is improperly called, the chimney swallow. No one ever saw him sitting on a perch or walking on the ground. In fact, his wings are so long, and his legs so short and weak, that if he were to alight on the ground, he would probably never be able to rise into the air again.

He hardly seems to need a description, and yet I suppose that many persons, not to say people in general, do not know him from a swallow. His color is sooty brown, turning to gray on the throat. His body, as he is seen in the air, is shaped like a bobbin, bluntly pointed at both ends. If he is carefully watched, however,

it will be noticed that he spreads his tail for an instant whenever he changes suddenly the direction of his flight. In other words, he uses his tail as a rudder.

He shoots about the sky at a tremendous speed, much of the time sailing, with his long, narrow wings firmly set, and is especially lively and noisy toward nightfall. Very commonly two or three of the birds fly side by side, cackling merrily and acting very much as if they were amusing themselves with some kind of game.

They feed on the wing, and have wide, gaping mouths perfectly adapted to that purpose.

As their name implies, they build their nests and pass the night mostly in chimneys, although in the wilder parts of the country they still inhabit hollow trees. Numbers of pairs live together in a colony.

One of the chimneys of a certain house near the Charles River, in Newton, Massachusetts, has for many years been a favorite resort of swifts. I have many times visited the place to watch the birds go to roost. Little by little they gather in a flock, as twilight comes on, and then for an hour or more the whole company, hundreds in number, go sweeping over the valley in broad circles, having the chimney for a centre. Gradually the circles become narrower, and at the

same time the excitement of the flock increases. Again and again the birds approach the chimney, as if they meant to descend into it. Then away they shoot for another round.

At length the going to roost actually begins. Half a dozen or a dozen of the birds drop one by one into the chimney. The rest sweep away, and when they come back, a second detachment drops in. And so the lively performance goes on till the last straggler folds his wings above the big black cavity and tumbles headlong out of sight.

The swift makes his nest of twigs, and as he cannot alight on the ground in search of them, he is compelled to gather them from the dead limbs of trees. Over and over again you will see the bird dart against such a limb, catching at a twig as he pauses for the merest instant before it. It is difficult to be sure whether he succeeds or not, his movements are so rapid, but it is certain that he must often fail. However, he acts upon the old motto, "Try, try again," and in course of time the nest is built. And an extremely pretty nest it is, with the white eggs in it, the black twigs glued firmly together with the bird's own saliva.

XV

NIGHTHAWK AND WHIP-POOR-WILL

Rustic people are a little shy of theories and "book-learning." Not long ago — it was early in March — I met an old man who lives by himself in a kind of hermitage in the woods, and who knows me in a general way as a bird student. We greeted each other, and I inquired whether he had seen any bluebirds yet. No, he said, it was n't time.

"Oh, but they are here," I answered. "I saw a flock of ten on the 26th of February." Good-natured incredulity came out all over his face.

"Did you hear them sing?" he asked.

"Yes," said I; "and, furthermore, I saw some this forenoon very near your house."

"Well," he remarked, "according to my experience, it is too early for bluebirds. Besides, they never go in flocks; and when anybody tells me at this time of the year that he has seen a flock of bluebirds, I always know that he has seen some blue snowbirds."

He spoke with an air of finality which left me nothing to do but to smile and pass on.

This little incident called to mind another, and that put it into my head to write this article.

A farmer, who had seen me passing his house and loitering about his lanes and fields for several years, often with an opera-glass in my hand, one day hailed me to ask whether the nighthawk and the whip-poor-will were the same bird, as he had heard people say. I assured him (or rather I told him — it turned out that I had not made him sure) that they were quite distinct, and proceeded to remark upon some of the more obvious points of difference between the two, especially as to their habits and manner of life. He listened with all deference to what I had to offer, but as I concluded and turned to leave him, he said: "Well, some folks *say* they 're the same. They say one 's the he one and t' other 's the she one; but I guess they ain't."

Verily, thought I, popular science lectures are sometimes a failure. Not long afterward I was telling the story to a Massachusetts man, a man who had made a collection of birds' eggs in his time.

"Why," said he, "are n't they the same? I always understood that they were the male and female of the same species. That was the common belief where I was brought up."

NIGHTHAWK

The confusion of the two birds is widespread, in spite of Audubon's testimony that he had seldom seen a farmer or even a boy in the United States who did not know the difference between them. But, while they resemble each other closely, they are sufficiently unlike to be classified not only as separate species, but as species of different genera. As for the difference in their habits, it is such as any one may see and appreciate. The nighthawk, for all its name, is not a night bird. It is most active at twilight, — in other words, it is crepuscular instead of nocturnal, — but is often to be seen flying abroad at midday. The whip-poor-will, on the contrary, is quiet till after dark. Then it starts into fullness of life, singing with the utmost enthusiasm, till the listener wonders where it can find breath for such rapid and long-continued efforts. The nighthawk is not a musician. While flying it frequently utters a single note, of a guttural-nasal quality, almost indistinguishable from the so-called bleat of the woodcock; but, in place of singing, it indulges in a fine aerial tumbling performance, much in the manner of the snipe. This performance I have many times observed in early summer from the Public Garden in Boston. I have seen it also in September, though it is doubtless much less common at that season.

The bird rises gradually to a considerable height, and presently drops like a stone almost to the ground. At the last moment it arrests itself suddenly, and then is heard a very peculiar "booming" noise, whether produced by the wings or by the voice, I will not presume to say.

The most attractive feature of the nighthawk, to my eye, is its beautiful and peculiar flight — a marvel of ease and grace, and sufficient to distinguish it at a glance from every other New England bird. It is a creature of the upper air, never skimming the ground, so far as I know, and as it passes overhead you may easily see the large white patch in the middle of each long wing — a beauty spot, by the way, which is common to both sexes, and is wanting in the whip-poor-will.

The whip-poor-will's chief distinction is its song — a song by itself, and familiar to every one. Some people call it mournful, and I fear there are still a few superstitious souls who listen to it with a kind of trembling. I have heard of the bird's being shot because the inhabitants of a house could not bear its doleful and boding cry, as they were pleased to consider it. To my ears it is sweet music. I take many an evening stroll on purpose to enjoy it, and am perennially thankful to Audubon for saying that he found the

WHIP-POOR-WILL

whip-poor-will's "cheering voice" more interesting than the song of the nightingale.

It will surprise unscientific readers to be told that the nearest relatives of whip-poor-wills and nighthawks are the swifts and the hummingbirds. As if a chimney swift were more like a whip-poor-will than like a swallow! and, still more absurd, as if there were any close relationship between whip-poor-wills and hummingbirds! Put a whip-poor-will and a ruby-throated hummer side by side and they certainly do look very little alike — the big whip-poor-will, with its mottled plumage and its short, gaping beak, and the tiny hummingbird with its burnished feathers and its long needle of a bill. Evidently there is no great reliance to be placed upon outside show, or what scientific men call "external characters." We might as well say that the strawberry vine and the apple-tree were own cousins. Yes, so we might, for the apple-tree and the strawberry vine *are* cousins — at least they are members of the same great and noble family, the family of the roses! We shall never get far, in science or in anything else, until we learn to look below the surface.

XVI

THE FLICKER

The flicker is the largest of our common American woodpeckers, being somewhat longer and stouter than the robin. It is known, by sight at least, to almost every one who notices birds at all, and perhaps for this reason it has received an unusual number of popular names. "Golden-winged woodpecker," which is probably the best known of these, comes from the fact that the bird's wings are yellow on the under side. "Harry Wicket," "Highhole," — because its nest is sometimes pretty far above the ground, — "Yellowhammer," and "Pigeon-woodpecker" are also among its more familiar nicknames.

Unlike other birds of its family, the flicker passes much of its time on the ground, where it hops awkwardly about, feeding upon insects, especially upon ants. As you come near it, while it is thus engaged, it rises with a peculiar purring sound, and as it flies from you it shows a broad white patch on its rump — the lower

FLICKER

1. Male. 2. Females

back, above the root of the tail. Every one who has ever walked much over grassy fields must have seen the bird and been struck by this conspicuous light mark. He must have noticed, too, the bird's peculiar up-and-down, "jumping" manner of flight, by which it goes swooping across the country in long undulations or waves.

The flicker's general color is brown, with spottings and streakings of black, and more or less of violet or lilac shading. On the back of its neck it wears a band of bright scarlet, and across its breast is a conspicuous black crescent.

It is fond of old apple orchards, and often makes its nest in a decaying trunk. In some places, near the seashore, especially, — where it is commoner than elsewhere in winter, and where large trees are scarce, — it makes enemies by its habit of drilling holes in barns and even in churches. I remember a meeting-house on Cape Cod which had a good number of such holes in its front wall — or rather it had the scars of such holes, for they had been covered with patches of tin. That was a case where going to church might be called a bad habit.

In fall and winter, if not at other seasons, the flicker feeds largely upon berries. In years when the poison ivy bears a good crop, I am

pretty sure to find two or three flickers all winter long about a certain farm, the stone walls of which are overrun with this handsome but unwholesome vine, although it is hard to imagine that the dry, stony fruit should yield much in the way of nourishment, even to a woodpecker.

As spring comes on, the flicker becomes numerous and very noisy. His best known vocal effort is a prolonged *hi-hi-hi*, very loud and ringing, and kept up until the listener wonders where the author of it gets his wind. This, I think, is the bird's substitute for a song. He has at all times a loud, unmusical *yawp*, — a signal, I suppose, — and in the mating season especially he utters a very affectionate, conversational *wicker* or *flicker*. Every country boy should be familiar with these three notes.

But besides being a vocalist, — we can hardly call him a singer, — the flicker is a player upon instruments. He is a great drummer; and if any one imagines that woodpeckers do not enjoy the sound of their own music, he should watch a flicker drumming with his long bill on a battered tin pan in the middle of a pasture. Morning after morning I have seen one thus engaged, drumming lustily, and then cocking his head to listen for an answer; and Paderewski at his daily practice upon the piano could not have

looked more in earnest. At other times the flicker contents himself with a piece of resonant loose bark or a dry limb.

One proof that this drumming — which is indulged in by woodpeckers generally — is a true musical performance, and not a mere drilling for grubs, is the fact that we never hear it in winter. It begins as the weather grows mild, and is as much a sign of spring as the peeping of the little tree-frogs — hylas — in the meadow.

The flicker's nest, as I have said, is built in a hole in a tree, often an apple-tree. Very noisy in his natural disposition, he keeps a wise silence while near the spot where his mate is sitting, and will rear a brood under the orchard-owner's nose without betraying himself. The young birds are fed from the parent's crop, as young pigeons and young hummingbirds are. The old bird thrusts its bill down the throat of the nestling and gives it a meal of partially digested food by what scientific people call a process of regurgitation. Farmers' boys, who have watched pigeons feeding their squabs, will know precisely what is meant.

XVII

THE BITTERN

It was a great day for me when I first heard the so-called booming of the bittern. For more than ten years I had devoted the principal part of my spare hours to the study of birds, but though I had taken many an evening walk near the most promising meadows in my neighborhood, I could never hear those mysterious pumping or stake-driving noises of which I had read with so much interest, especially in the writings of Thoreau.

The truth was, as I have since assured myself, that this representative of the heron family was not a resident within the limits of my everyday rambles, none of the meadows thereabout being extensive and secluded enough to suit his whim.

There came a day, however, when with a friend I made an afternoon excursion to Wayland, Massachusetts, on purpose to form the stake-driver's acquaintance. We walked up the railway track across the river toward Sudbury,

and were hardly seated on the edge of the meadow, facing the beautiful Nobscot Hill, before my comrade said, "Hark! There he is!"

Yes, that certainly was the very sound — an old-fashioned wooden pump at work in the meadow.

We listened intently for perhaps half a dozen times; then I proposed going further up the track to get the notes at shorter range, and possibly — who could tell what unheard-of thing might happen? — to obtain a sight of the bird. We advanced cautiously, though as we were on the track, six feet or more above the level of the meadow, there was no chance of concealment, and the bittern went on with his performance.

Meanwhile we maintained a sharp lookout, and presently I descried a narrow brown object standing upright amidst the grass — a stick, perhaps. I lifted my opera-glass and spoke quickly to my friend: "I see him!"

"Where?" he asked; and when I lowered my glass and gave him the bird's bearings as related to the remains of an old hayrick not far off, he said, "Why, I saw that, but took it for a stick."

"Yes, but see the eye," I answered.

Within half a minute the bird suddenly threw his head forward and commenced pumping.

This was good luck indeed, — that I should surprise my very first bittern in his famous act, a thing which better men than I, after years of familiarity with the bird, had never once succeeded in accomplishing. Who says that Fortune does not sometimes favor the fresh hand?

The fellow repeated the operation three times, and between whiles moved stealthily through the grass toward the leavings of the haycock before mentioned.

When he reached the hay, we held our breath. Would he actually mount it? Yes, that was undoubtedly his intention; but he meant to do it in such a way that no mortal eye should see him. All the time glancing furtively to left and right, as if the grass were full of enemies, he put one foot before the other with almost inconceivable slowness, — as the hour hand turns on the clock's face. It was an admirable display of an art which this race of frog, mouse, and insect catchers has cultivated for untold generations — an art on which its livelihood depends, the art of invisible motion.

There was no resisting the ludicrousness of his manner. He was in full view, but so long as he kept still he seemed to think himself quite safe from detection. Like the hand of the clock, however, if he was slow he was sure, and in time

he was fairly out of the grass, standing in plain sight upon his hay platform.

Once in position he fell to pumping in earnest, and kept it up for more than an hour, while two enthusiasts sat upon the railway embankment, twelve or thirteen rods distant, with opera-glasses and note-books, scrutinizing his every motion, and felicitating themselves again and again on seeing thus plainly what so few had ever seen at all. What would Thoreau have given for such an opportunity?

"The stake-driver is at it in his favorite meadow," he writes in his journal, in 1852. "I followed the sound, and at last got within two rods, it seeming always to recede, and drawing you, like a will-o'-the-wisp, farther away into the meadows. When thus near, I heard some lower sounds at the beginning like striking on a stump or a stake, a dry, hard sound, and then followed the gurgling, pumping notes fit to come from a meadow.

"This was just within the blueberry and other bushes, and when the bird flew up, alarmed, I went to the place, but could see no water, which makes me doubt if water is necessary to it in making the sound. Perhaps it thrusts its bill so deep as to reach water where it is dry on the surface."

This notion that water is employed in the production of the bittern's notes has been generally entertained. The notes themselves are of a character to suggest such an hypothesis, and at least one witness has borne circumstantial testimony to its truth. In Thoreau's essay on the "Natural History of Massachusetts," he says: —

"On one occasion, the bird has been seen by one of my neighbors to thrust its bill into the water, and suck up as much as it could hold; then, raising its head, it pumped it out again with four or five heaves of the neck, throwing it two or three feet, and making the sound each time."

Similar statements have been made as to the corresponding notes of the European bittern. None of our systematic writers upon American ornithology have ever witnessed the performance, as far as appears, and being too honest to draw upon their imaginations, they have left the matter a mystery. Now, on this auspicious May afternoon, if we learned nothing else, we could at all events make quite sure whether or not the bittern did really spout water from his beak.

My readers will have guessed already that our bird, at least, did nothing of the sort. His bill was never within reach of water. The operation is a queer one, hard to describe.

The bittern has been standing motionless, perhaps in the humpbacked attitude in which the artists, following Audubon's plate, have commonly represented him; or quite as likely, he has been making a stick or a soldier of himself, standing bolt upright at full stretch, his long neck and bill pointed straight at the zenith.

Suddenly he lowers his head, and instantly raises it again and throws it forward with a quick, convulsive jerk. This movement is attended by an opening and shutting of the bill, which in turn is accompanied by a sound which has been well compared to a violent hiccough. The hiccough — with which, I think, the click of the big mandibles may sometimes be heard — is repeated a few times, each time a little louder than before; and then succeed the real pumping or stake-driving noises.

These are in sets of three syllables each, of which the first syllable is the longest, and somewhat separated from the others. The accent is strongly upon the middle syllable, and the whole, as oftenest heard, is an exact reproduction of the sound of a wooden pump, as I have already said, the voice having that peculiar hollow quality which is produced, not by the flow of the water, but by the suction of the air in the tube when the pump begins to work.

But the looker-on is likely to be quite as much impressed by what he sees as by what he hears. During the whole performance, but especially during the latter part of it, the bird is engaged in the most violent contortions, suggestive of nothing but a patient suffering from uncontrollable nausea. Moreover, as soon as the preliminary hiccoughs begin, the lower throat or breast is seen to be swelling; the dilatation grows larger and larger till the pumping is well under way, and so far as my companion and I could detect, does not subside in the least until the noises have ceased altogether.

How are the unique, outlandish notes produced? I cannot profess to know. Our opinion was that the bird swallowed air into his gullet, gulping it down with each snap of the beak. To all appearance it was necessary for him to inflate the crop in this way before he could pump, or boom. As to how much of the grand booming was connected with the swallowing of the air, and how much, if any, with the expulsion of it, my friend and I did not agree, and of course neither of us could do more than guess.

I made some experiments afterwards, by way of imitating the noises; and these experiments, together with the fact that the grand booming seemed to be really nothing more than a develop-

ment of the preliminary hiccoughs, and the further fact that the swelling of the breast did not go down gradually during the course of the performance, but suddenly at the close, — all these incline me to believe that the notes are mainly if not entirely caused by the inhalation or swallowing of the air; and I am somewhat strengthened in this opinion by perceiving that when a man takes air into his stomach the act is attended by a sound not altogether unlike the bittern's note in quality, while the expulsion of it gives rise to noises of an entirely dissimilar character.

That the sounds in question were not made entirely by any ordinary action of the vocal organs was the decided opinion of both my friend and myself.

As I have said, we watched the performance for more than an hour. We were sitting squarely upon the track, and once were compelled to get up to let a train pass; but the bittern evidently paid no attention to matters on the railway, being well used to thunder in that direction, and stood his ground without wincing.

When he had pumped long enough, — and the operation surely looked like pretty hard work, — he suddenly took wing and flew a little distance down the meadow. The moment he dropped into the grass he pumped, and on making another

flight he again pumped immediately upon coming to the ground. This trick, which surprised me not a little in view of the severe exertion required, is perhaps akin to the habit of smaller birds, who in seasons of excitement will very often break into song at the moment of striking a perch.

As we came down the track on our way back to the station, three bitterns were in the air at once, while a fourth was booming on the opposite side of the road. One of the flying birds persistently dangled his legs instead of drawing them up in the usual fashion and letting the feet stick out behind, parallel with the tail. Probably he was "showing off," as is the custom of many birds during the season of mating.

Our bird across the road, by the bye, was not pumping, but driving a stake. The middle syllable was truly a mighty whack with a mallet on the head of a post, so that I could easily enough credit Mr. Samuels's statement that he once followed the sound for half a mile, expecting to find a farmer setting a fence.

In the midst of the hurly-burly we saw a boy coming toward us on the track.

"Let 's ask him about it," said my companion.

So, with an air of inquisitive ignorance, he stopped the fellow, and inquired, "Do you know what it is we hear making that curious noise off there in the meadow?"

The boy evidently took us for a pair of ignoramuses from the city.

"I guess it 's a frog," he answered. But when the sounds were repeated he shook his head and confessed honestly that he did n't know what made them.

It was too bad, I thought, that he did not stick to his frog theory. It would have made so much better a story! He appeared to feel no curiosity about the matter, and we allowed him to pass on unenlightened.

Not all Wayland people are thus poorly informed, however, and we shortly learned, to our considerable satisfaction, that they have a most felicitous local name for the bird. They call him "plum-pudd'n'," which is exactly what he himself says, only that his *u* is in both words somewhat long, like the vowel in "full." To get the true effect of the words they should be spoken with the lips nearly closed, and in a deep voice.

A few days after this excursion I found a bittern in a large wet meadow somewhat nearer home. At the nearest he was a long way off, and as I went farther and farther away from him, I remarked the very unexpected fact that the last syllable to be lost was not the second, which bears so sharp an accent, but the long

first syllable. It seemed contrary to reason, but such was unquestionably the truth, and later experiments confirmed it.

This was in the spring of 1888. In May of the next year, if all went well, we would see the show again. So we said to each other; but a veteran ornithologist remarked that we should probably be a good many years older before we had another such piece of good fortune.

It is a fact familiar to all naturalists, however, that when you have once found a new plant, or a new bird, or a new nest, the experience is likely to be soon repeated. You may have spent a dozen years in a vain search, but now, for some reason, the difficult has all at once become easy, and almost before you can believe your eyes the rarity has grown to be a drug in the market. Something like this proved to be true of the bittern's boom.

On the afternoon of the 2d of May, 1889, I went to one of my favorite resorts, a large cat-tail swamp surrounded by woods. My particular errand was to see whether the least bittern had arrived, — a much smaller, and in this part of the country, at least, a much less common bird than his relative of whose vocal accomplishments I am here treating.

I threw myself down upon the cliff overhang-

ing the edge of the swamp, to listen for the desired *coo-coo-coo-coo*, and had barely made myself comfortable when I heard the *plum-pudd'n'* of the bittern himself, proceeding, as it seemed, from the reeds directly at my feet. Further listening satisfied me that the fellow was not far from the end of a rocky peninsula which juts into the swamp just at this point.

I slipped down the cliff as quietly as possible, picked my way across the narrow neck leading to the main peninsula, and by keeping behind rocks and trees managed to reach the very tip without disturbing the bird. Here I posted myself among the thick trees, and awaited a repetition of the boom. It was not long in coming, and plainly proceeded from a bunch of flags just across a little stretch of clear water.

I looked and looked, while the bittern continued to pump at rather protracted intervals; but I could see nothing whatever, till presto! there the creature stood in plain sight.

Whether he had moved into view, or had all the time been visible, I cannot tell. He soon pumped again, and then again, for perhaps six times. Then he stalked away out of sight, and I heard nothing more. He was much nearer than last year's bird had been, but was still a pumper, not a stake-driver, and his action was in all respects the same as I had before witnessed.

There had been no bittern in this swamp the season previous, nor did any breed here this summer. I visited the place too often for him to have escaped my notice, had he been present. This bird, then, was a migrant, and his booming was of interest as showing that the bittern, like the song-birds, does not wait to get into summer quarters before beginning to rehearse his love music.

Two days after this my companion of the year before went with me again to Wayland, and, not to prolong a long story, we sat again upon the railway and watched a bittern pump for more than an hour. This time, to be sure, he was partially concealed by the grass, besides being farther away than we could have wished.

It was curious, and illustrated strikingly the utility of the bird's habit of standing motionless, that my friend, who is certainly as sharp-eyed an observer as I have ever known, was once more completely taken in. As luck would have it, I caught sight of the bird first, and when I pointed him out to the other man he replied, "Why, of course I saw that, but it never occurred to me but that it was a stake."

We returned from this excursion fairly well convinced that in the early part of the season, while the grass is still short, one may hope to

see a bittern pump almost any day, if he will go to a suitable meadow which has a railroad running through it. The track answers a double purpose: it gives the observer an outlook, such as cannot be obtained from a boat, and furthermore, the birds are quite unsuspicious of things on the track, while the presence of a man in the grass or on the river would almost inevitably attract their attention.

XVIII

BIRDS FOR EVERYBODY

Some birds belong exclusively to specialists. They are so rare, or their manner of life is so seclusive, that people in general can never be expected to know them except from books. The latest list of the birds of Massachusetts includes about three hundred and fifty species and subspecies. Of these, seventy-five or more are so foreign to this part of the country as to have appeared here only by accident, while many others are so excessively rare that no individual observer can count upon seeing them, however close a lookout he may keep. Other species are present in goodly numbers, but only in certain portions of the State; and still others, though generally distributed and fairly numerous, live habitually in almost impenetrable swamps or in deep forests, and of necessity are seen only by those who make it their business to look for them.

It is something for which busy men and women may well be thankful, therefore, that so many of

the most pleasing, or otherwise interesting, of all our birds are among those which may be called birds for everybody. Such are the robin, the bluebird, the Baltimore oriole, — or golden robin, — the blue jay, the crow, and the chickadee. Of all these we may say that they are common ; they come in every one's way, and, what is still more to the point, they cannot be mistaken for anything else. Others are equally common, and are easily enough seen, but their identity is not so much a matter of course.

The song sparrow, for example, is abundant in Massachusetts from the middle of March to the end of October. Outside of the forest it is almost ubiquitous ; it sings beautifully and with the utmost freedom ; it ought, one would say, to be universally known. But it is *a* sparrow, not *the* sparrow. In other words, it is only one of many, and so, common as it is, and freely as it sings (it is to be heard in every garden and by every roadside in the latter half of March, when few other birds are in tune), it passes unrecognized by the generality of people. They read in books of song sparrows, chipping sparrows, field sparrows, tree sparrows, swamp sparrows, vesper sparrows, white-throated sparrows, fox sparrows, yellow-winged sparrows, savanna sparrows, and the like, and when they see any little mottled brown bird,

they say, "Oh, it 's a sparrow," and seek to know nothing more.

The family of warblers — among the loveliest of all birds — are in a still worse case, and much the same may be said of swallows and blackbirds, thrushes and vireos. The number of species and their perplexing similarity, which are such an attraction to the student, prove an effectual bar to those who have time and money for newspapers and novels, but can spare neither for a manual of local ornithology.

I have named six birds which every one knows, or may know, but of course I do not mean that these are all. Why should not everybody know the goldfinch — a small, stout-billed, bright yellow, canary-like bird, with black wings and tail and a black cap? And the flicker — or golden-winged woodpecker — a little larger than the robin, with gold-lined wings, a black crescent on the breast, a red patch on the back of the head, and a white rump, conspicuous as the bird takes wing? The hummingbird, too — our only one; I should say that everybody ought to recognize it, only that I have found some who confuse it with sphinx moths, and will hardly believe me when I tell them of their mistake. The cedar-bird, likewise, known also as the cherry-bird and the waxwing, is a bird by itself; re-

markably trim and sleek, its upper parts of a peculiarly warm cinnamon brown, its lower parts yellowish, its tail tipped handsomely with yellow, its head marked with black and adorned with a truly magnificent top-knot; as great a lover of cherries as any schoolboy, and one of the first birds upon which the youthful taxidermist tries his hand. Just now — in early March — the waxwings are hereabout in great flocks (I saw more than a hundred, surely, three days ago), stuffing themselves, literally, with savin berries. These large flocks will after a while disappear, and some time later, in May, smaller companies will arrive from the South and settle with us for the summer, helping themselves to our cherries in return for the swarms of insects of whose presence they have relieved us. If we see them thus engaged, we shall do well to remember the Scripture text, "The laborer is worthy of his hire."

This enumeration of birds, so strongly marked that even a wayfaring man may easily name them, might be extended indefinitely. It would be a strange Massachusetts boy who did not know the ruffed grouse (though he would probably call him the partridge) and the Bob White; the kingbird, with his black and white plumage, his aerial tumblings, and his dashing pursuit of the crow; the splendid scarlet tanager, fiery red, with black

tail and wings; the bobolink; the red-winged blackbird, whose watery *conkaree* is so welcome a sound about the meadows in March; the slate-colored snowbird; the indigo-bird, small, deep blue throughout, and with a thick bill; the butcher-bird, a constant though not numerous winter visitor, sometimes flying against windows in which canaries are hung, as one did at our house only this winter — these surely may be known by any who will take even slight pains to form their acquaintance. And, beside these, there are two birds whom everybody *does* know, but whom I forgot to include with the six first mentioned, — the catbird and the brown thrasher, two overgrown, long-tailed wrens, near relatives of the mockingbird, both of them great singers in their way, and one of them — the catbird — decidedly familiar and a fairly good mimic.

XIX

WINTER PENSIONERS

Our northern winter is a lean time, ornithologically, though it brings us some choice birds of its own, and is not without many alleviations. When the redpolls come in crowds and the white-winged crossbills in good numbers, both of which things happened last year, the world is not half so bad with us as it might be. Still, winter is winter, a season to be tided over rather than doted upon, and anything which helps to make the time pass agreeably is matter for thankfulness. So I am asked to write something about the habit we are in at our house of feeding birds in cold weather, and thus keeping them under the windows. Really we have done nothing peculiar, nor has our success been beyond that of many of our neighbors; but such as it is, the work has given us much enjoyment, and the readers of "Bird-Lore" are welcome to the story.

Our method is to put out pieces of raw suet, mostly the trimmings of beefsteak. These we

attach to branches of trees and to the veranda trellis, taking pains, of course, to have them beyond the cat's reach (that the birds may feed safely), and at the same time well disposed for our own convenience as spectators. For myself, in addition, I generally nail pieces of the bait upon one or two of the outer sills of my study windows. I like, as I sit reading or writing, to hear now and then a nuthatch or a chickadee hammering just outside the pane. Often I rise to have a look at the visitor. There is nothing but the glass between us, and I can stand near enough to see his beady eyes, and, so to speak, the expression of his face. Sometimes two birds are there at once, one waiting for the other. Sometimes they have a bit of a set-to. Then, certainly, they are not without facial expression.

Once in a while, in severe weather, I have sprinkled crumbs (sweet or fatty crumbs are best — say bits of doughnut) on the inside ledge, and then, with the window raised a few inches, have awaited callers. If the weather is bad enough they are not long in coming. A chickadee alights on the outer sill, notices the open window, scolds a little (the thing looks like a trap — at all events it is something new, and birds are conservative), catches sight of the crumbs (well, now, that 's another story), ceases his *dee, dee, dee*, and the next minute hops inside.

A DOWNY WOODPECKER

A BRANCH ESTABLISHMENT

The crumbs prove to be appetizing, and by the time he has swallowed a few of them he seems to forget how he came in, and instead of backing out, as a reasonable being like a chickadee might be expected to do, he flies to another light of the bay window. Then, lest he should injure himself, I must get up and catch him and show him to the door. By the time I have done this two or three times within half an hour, I begin to find it an interruption to other work, and put down the window. White-breasted nuthatches and downies come often to the outer sill, but only the chickadees ever venture inside.

These three are our daily pensioners. If they are all in the tree together, as they very often are, they take precedence at the larder according to their size. No nuthatch presumes to hurry a woodpecker, and no chickadee ever thinks of disturbing a nuthatch. He may fret audibly, calling the other fellow greedy, for aught I know, and asking him if he wants the earth; but he maintains a respectful distance. Birds, like wild things in general, have a natural reverence for size and weight.

The chickadees are much the most numerous with us, but taking the year together, the woodpeckers are the most constant. My notes record them as present in the middle of October, 1899,

and now, in the middle of October, 1900, they are still in daily attendance. Perhaps there were a few weeks of midsummer when they stayed away, but I think not. One pair built a nest somewhere in the neighborhood and depended on us largely for supplies, much to their convenience and our pleasure. As soon as the red-capped young ones were able to fly, the parents brought them to the tree and fed them with the suet (it was a wonder how much of it they could eat), till they were old enough to help themselves. And they act, old and young alike, as if they owned the place. If a grocer's wagon happens to stop under the tree they wax indignant, and remain so till it drives away. Even the black cat, Satan, has come to acknowledge their rights in the case, and no longer so much as thinks of them as possible game.

I have spoken, I see, as if these three species were all; but, not to mention the blue jays, whose continual visits are rather ineffectively frowned upon (they carry off too much at once), we had last winter, for all the latter half of it, a pair of red-bellied nuthatches. They dined with us daily (pretty creatures they are), and stayed so late in the spring that I began to hope the handy food-supply would induce them to tarry for the summer. They were mates, I think. At any

rate, they preferred to eat from the same bit of fat, one on each side, in great contrast with all the rest of our company. Frequently, too, a brown creeper would be seen hitching up the trunk or over the larger limbs. He likes pleasant society, though he has little to say, and perhaps found scraps of suet in the crevices of the bark, where the chickadees, who are given to this kind of providence, may have packed it in store. Somewhat less frequently a goldcrest would come with the others, fluttering amid the branches like a sprite. One bird draws another, especially in hard times. And so it happened that our tree, or rather trees, — an elm and a maple, — were something like an aviary the whole winter through. It was worth more than all the trouble which the experiment cost us to lie in bed before sunrise, with the mercury below zero, and hear a chickadee just outside singing as sweetly as any thrush could sing in June. If he had been trying to thank us, he could not have done it more gracefully.

The worse the weather, the better we enjoyed the birds' society; and the better, in general, they seemed to appreciate our efforts on their behalf. It was noticeable, however, that chickadees were with us comparatively little during high, cold winds. On the 18th of February, for

example, we had a blizzard, with driving snow, the most inclement day of the winter. At seven o'clock, when I looked out, four downy woodpeckers were in the elm, all trying their best to eat, though the branches shook till it was hard work to hold on. They stayed much of the forenoon. At ten o'clock, when the storm showed signs of abating, though it was still wild enough, a chickadee made his appearance and whistled *Phœbe* again and again — "a long time," my note says — in his cheeriest manner. Who can help loving a bird so courageous, "so frolic, stout, and self-possest"? Emerson did well to call him a "scrap of valor." Yet I find from a later note that "there were nothing like the usual number of chickadees so long as the fury lasted." Doubtless most of them stayed among the evergreens. It is an old saying of the chickadee's, frequently quoted, "Be bold, be bold, but not too bold." On the same day I saw a member of the household snowballing an English sparrow away from one branch, while a downy woodpecker continued to feed upon the next one. The woodpecker had got the right idea of things. Honest folk need not fear the constable.

XX

WATCHING THE PROCESSION

It begins to go by my door about the first of March, and is three full months in passing. The participants are all in uniform, each after his kind, some in the brightest of colors, some in Quakerish grays and browns. They seem not to stand very strictly upon the order of their coming; red-coats and blue-coats travel side by side. Like the flowers, they have a calendar of their own, and in their own way are punctual, but their movements are not to be predicted with anything like mathematical nicety. Of some companies of them I am never certain which will precede the other, just as I can never tell whether, in a particular season, the anemone or the five-finger will come first into bloom. They need no bands of music, no drum-corps nor fifers. The whole procession, indeed, is itself a band of music, a grand army of singers and players on instruments. They sing many tunes; each uniform has a tune of its own, but, unlike what

happens in military and masonic parades, there is never any jangling, no matter how near together the different bands may be marching.

As I said, the pageant lasts for three months. It is fortunate for me, perhaps, that it lasts no longer; for the truth is, I have grown so fond of watching it that I find it hard to attend to my daily work so long as the show continues. If I go inside for half a day, to read or to write, I am all the time thinking of what is going on outside. Who knows what I may be missing at this very minute? I keep by me a prospectus of the festival, a list of all who are expected to take part in it, and, like most watchers of such parades, I have my personal favorites for whom I am always on the lookout. One thing troubles me: there is never a year that I do not miss a good many (a *bad* many, I feel like saying) of those whose names appear in the announcements. Some of them, indeed, I have *never* seen. If they are really in the ranks, it must be that their numbers are very small; for the printed programme tells exactly how they will be dressed, and I am sure I should recognize them if they came within sight. Some of them, I fancy, do not keep their engagements.

I spoke, to begin with, of their passing my door. But I spoke figuratively. Some, it is

true, do pass my door, and even tarry for a day or two under my windows, but to see others I have to go into the woods. Some I find only in deep, almost impenetrable swamps, dodging in and out among thick bushes and cat-tails. A good many follow the coast. I watch them running along the sea-beach on the edge of the surf, or walking sedately over muddy flats where I need rubber boots in which to follow them. Some are silent during the day, but as darkness comes on indulge in music and queer aerial dancing.

Many travel altogether by night, resting and feeding in the daytime. It is pleasant to stand out of doors in the evening, and hear them calling to each other overhead as they hasten northward ; for at this time of the year, I have forgotten to say, they are always traveling in a northerly direction.

The procession, as such, has no definite terminus. It breaks up gradually by the dropping out of its members here and there. Each of them knows pretty well where he is going. This one, who came perhaps from Cuba, means to stop in Massachusetts; that one, after a winter in Central America, has in view a certain swamp or meadow, or, it may be, some mountain-top, in New Hampshire ; another will not be at home till

he reaches the furthermost coast of Labrador or the banks of the Saskatchewan. The prospectus of which I spoke, and of which every reader ought to have a copy, tells, in a general way, whither each company is bound, but the members of the same company often scatter themselves over several degrees of latitude.

Some of the companies move compactly, and are only two or three days, more or less, in passing a given point. You must be in the woods, for example, on the 12th or 13th of May, or you will miss them altogether. Others straggle along for a whole month. You begin to think, perhaps, that they mean to stay with you all summer, but some morning you wake up to the fact that the last one has gone.

It is curious how few people see this army of travelers. They pass by thousands and hundreds of thousands. More than a hundred different companies go through every town in Massachusetts between March 1 and June 1. They dress gayly — not a few of them seem to have borrowed Joseph's coat — and are full of music, yet somehow their advent excites little remark. Perhaps it is because, for the most part, they flit from bush to bush and from tree to tree, here one and there one. If some year they should form in line, and move in close order along the

public streets, what a stir they would excite! For a day or two the newspapers would be full of the sensation, and possibly the baseball reporters would be compelled for once to shorten their accounts of Battum's "wonderful left-hand catch" and Ketchum's "phenomenal slide to the second base." It is just as well, I dare say, that nothing of this kind should ever happen, for it is hard to see how the great reading public could bear even the temporary loss of such interesting and instructive narratives.

Meantime, though the greater part of the people pay no heed to these "birds of passage," some of us are never tired of watching them. I myself used to be fond of gazing at military and political parades. In my time I have seen a good many real soldiers and a good many make-believes. But as age comes on, I find myself, rightly or wrongly, caring less and less for such spectacles. It will never be so, I think, with the procession of which I am now writing. I have never watched it with more enthusiasm than this very year. It is only just over, but I am already beginning to count upon its autumnal return, and by the middle of August shall be looking every day for its advance couriers.

Till then I shall please myself with observing the ways of such of the host as have happened

to drop out of the procession in my immediate neighborhood. One of them I can hear singing at this very moment. He and his wife spent the winter in Mexico, as well as I can determine, and have been back with us since the 11th of May. They have pitched their tent for the summer in the top of a tall elm directly in front of my door, and just now are much occupied with household cares. The little husband (*Vireo gilvus* he is called in the official programme, but I have heard him spoken of, not inappropriately, as the warbling vireo) takes upon himself his full share of the family drudgery, and it is very pretty indeed to see him sitting in the tent and singing at his work. He sets us all, as I think, an excellent example.

XXI

SOUTHWARD BOUND

While walking through a piece of pine wood, three or four days ago, I was delighted to put my eye unexpectedly upon a hummingbird's nest. The fairy structure was placed squarely upon the upper surface of a naked, horizontal branch, and looked so fresh, trimmed outwardly with bits of gray lichen, that I felt sure it must have been built this year. But where now were the birds that built it, and the nestlings that were hatched in it? Who could tell? In imagination I saw the mother sitting upon the tiny, snow-white eggs, and then upon the two little ones — little ones, indeed, no bigger than bumble-bees at first. I saw her feeding them day by day, as they grew larger and larger, till at last the cradle was getting too narrow for them, and they were ready to make a trial of their wings. But where were they now? Not here, certainly. For a fortnight I had been passing down this path almost daily, and not once had I seen a hummingbird.

No, they are not here, and even as I write I seem to see the little family on their way to the far south. They are making the journey by easy stages, I hope — flitting from flower-bed to flower-bed, now in Connecticut, now in New Jersey, and so on through Pennsylvania and the Southern States. Will they cross the water to the West Indies, as some of their kind are said to do? or, less adventurous, will they keep straight on to some mountain-side in Costa Rica, or even in Brazil? I should be sorry to believe that the parent birds took their departure first, leaving the twin children to find their way after them as best they could — as those who have paid most attention to such matters assure us that many of our birds are in the habit of doing. But however they go, and wherever they end their long journey, may wind and weather be favorable, and old and young alike return, after the winter is over, to build other nests here in their native New England.

This passing of birds back and forth, a grand semi-annual tide, is to me a thing of wonder. I think of the millions of sandpipers and plovers which for two months (it is now late in September) have been pouring southward along the sea-coast. Some of them passed here on their way north no longer ago than the last days of May.

They went far up toward the Arctic circle, but before the end of July they were back again, hastening to the equator. The golden plover, we are told, travels from Greenland to Patagonia.

All summer the golden warblers were singing within sound of my windows. As I walked I saw them flitting in and out of the roadside bushes, beautiful and delicate creatures. But before the first of September the last of them disappeared. I did not see them depart. They took wing in the night, and almost before I suspected it they were gone. They will winter in Central or South America, and, within a week of May-day, we shall have them here again, as much at home as if they had never left us.

They were gone before the first of September, I said. But I was thinking of those which had summered in Massachusetts. In point of fact, I saw a golden warbler only ten days ago. He was with a mixed flock of travelers, and, in all likelihood, had come from the extreme north; for this dainty, blue-eyed warbler is common in summer, not only throughout the greater part of the United States, but on the very shores of the Arctic Ocean. So he voyages back and forth, living his life from land to land, as Tennyson says, led by who knows what impulse?

"Sweet bird, thy bower is ever green,
Thy sky is ever clear;
Thou hast no sorrow in thy song,
No winter in thy year."

It is worth giving a little time daily to what is called ornithology to be able to greet such wanderers as they come and go. For some days now a few Western palm warblers have been paying us a visit, and, though the town has never commissioned me to that office, I have taken it upon myself to do them the honors. They have met me halfway, at least, as the everyday expression is; yielding readily to my enticements, and more than once coming near enough to show me their white lower eyelids, so that I might be quite sure of their identity. A little later the *Eastern* palm warbler will be due, and I hope to find him equally complaisant; for I wish to see his lower eyelid, also, which is yellow instead of white.

At this time of the year, indeed, there is no lack of such interesting and well-dressed strangers, no matter where we may go. The woods are alive with them by day, and the air by night. There are few evenings when you may not hear them calling overhead as they hasten southward. Men who have watched them through telescopes, pointed at the full moon, have calculated their height at one or two miles. One observer saw

more than two hundred cross the moon's disk in two hours. The greater part passed so swiftly as to make it impossible to say more than that they were birds; but others, flying at a greater altitude, and therefore traversing the field of vision less rapidly, were identified as blackbirds, rails, snipe, and ducks. Another observer plainly recognized swallows, warblers, goldfinches, and woodpeckers.

All over the northern hemisphere to-night, in America, Europe, and Asia, countless multitudes of these wayfarers will be coursing the regions of the upper air; and to-morrow, if we go out with our eyes open, we shall find, here and there, busy little flocks of stragglers that have stopped by the way to rest and feed: sparrows, snowbirds, kinglets, nuthatches, chickadees, thrushes, warblers, wrens, and what not, a few of them singing, and every one of them evidently in love with life, and full of happy expectations.

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The Riverside Press
Electrotyped and printed by H. O. Houghton & Co.
Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.